TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

ATTN: FINANCE COMMITTEE

FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE: FEBRUARY 21, 2007 CMR: 146:07

SUBJECT: PRIORITIZATION OF POTENTIAL PARK PROJECTS UTILIZING PARK DEVELOPMENT FEES

RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests that the Finance Committee:

1) Review the attached information related to the prioritization of potential park projects including the criteria used to rank projects;

2) Recommend to Council the approval of the use of development impact fees for the top ten 2006-2009 park improvement projects; and

3) Consistent with the prioritized list, direct staff to proceed with the planning and development of proposed park projects as funds are available from Park Development Fee Fund.

BACKGROUND

On March 25, 2002, Council adopted an ordinance (Ordinance 4742 creating Chapter 16.58 of the PAMC) to establish development impact fees for parks, community centers and libraries (CMR:188:02) under the provisions of California Assembly Bill 1600. Park, Community Center, and Library development impact fees are legally required to be expended to augment recreational opportunities through the improvement of parks, community centers and libraries in order to compensate for increased demand for City facilities and services brought about by new residential and commercial development.

The ordinance became effective April 24, 2002, and applied retroactively to those project applications receiving final approval after January 28, 2002.

As of December 31, 2006, the balance of accumulated development impact fees for parks was $1,628,497. [The use of development impact fees for community centers and libraries will be discussed in a separate staff report.] In accordance with State law, funds derived from development impact fees must be spent or encumbered within five years from when the fee was collected by the City. Park development impact fees can only be used for park improvements or land acquisition and can not be used for any other purpose. In Fiscal Year 2005-2006, budgeted transfers in the amount of $367,000 was made from the Park fund to the Capital Improvement Fund for Stanford / Palo Alto Community Playing Fields, and $100,000 for park restroom installation.
DISCUSSION
After Council established the development impact fee ordinance in 2002, staff has worked with community groups, recreation clubs and the Parks and Recreation Commission to investigate strategies for enhancing and enlarging park and recreational facilities in order to mitigate for increased usage caused by new development. In these discussions a broad range of facilities were suggested including improved playing fields, addition of restrooms in neighborhood parks, the expansion of off-leash dog play areas, the construction of additional tennis courts, and the creation of other park and recreational facilities.

Evaluation Criteria
In order to evaluate the merit of the many suggestions for park and facility expansions, staff, in consultation with the Parks and Recreation Commission (Attachment B), developed a set of criteria to determine which projects would have the greatest benefit for the public, service the greatest number of users, and best leverage external funding.

The criteria that were used to prioritize potential park projects are:
- City Council Direction
- Legal Mandate
- Public Need
- Health and Safety Benefits
- Park and Recreation Commission Priority
- External Funding Sources
- Ability to mitigate for impacts caused by new development
- Estimated Project Cost/Benefit Ratio

Prioritization of Projects
Staff has developed a prioritized list of the ten projects (Attachment A) that will have the greatest impact on expanding recreational opportunities and providing community benefit. These projects total $2,892,000. Three of the projects (Stanford / Palo Alto Community Fields, Heritage Park playground, and Greer Park – Phase IV), which total $687,900, have already been approved by Council.

In evaluating the list of potential projects, the two greatest needs for facilities that were voiced by the public were increased access to playing fields and convenient public restrooms at neighborhood parks where field sports are played.

It is evident from user demand that there is not adequate field playing space in Palo Alto, especially for soccer, rugby and lacrosse. The high use of playing fields results in heavy wear of the turf and necessitates closing fields during a six-week period each year for re-seeding. Fields are also occasionally closed during wet weather to protect the turf from excessive damage.

By converting popular playing fields at the Cubberley Community Center, Greer Park and El Camino Park from natural sod to synthetic turf, the fields will endure the use of a full schedule of play and will not require renovation every year. As a result, fields can be scheduled to accommodate 10% to 25% more players each year.

Park use, especially at parks that have playing fields, has increased significantly over the past ten years. This increase in park usage has prompted comments and complaints from users about the
lack of restroom facilities. The addition of restrooms at neighborhood parks, such as Herbert Hoover Park, where softball, tennis and soccer are enjoyed by large crowds, has proven to be very popular with park users and neighbors of the parks. Complaints about public urination have been completely eliminated by the recent addition of restrooms.

Additionally, staff considered a request from the Palo Alto Tennis Club that adding lights at selected tennis courts be made a priority. Surveys have indicated that the sport of tennis is increasing. Tennis clubs and independent users have expressed a desire to play tennis in the evening after work, and after dinner. By adding lighting at popular tennis courts, such as Cubberley Community Center, prime time use of courts could increase by 30%. Tennis court use during winter months -when the sun sets earlier - would especially benefit from the addition of lighting.

In accordance with the provisions of PAMC Section 16.58.020 (a) that prescribes that fees be used for both land acquisition and park improvements, a portion of the Park Development Fee Fund has been allocated for future land acquisition. Specific parcels of land intended for acquisition are not identified in these recommendations in order to avoid inadvertently escalating the property value of desired parcels.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**
The development of new or expanded parks or City recreational facilities will result in some increased operational and maintenance expense. Development impact fees may not be used for the operation or maintenance of facilities or programs. The anticipated annual maintenance expense required for new restroom facilities is estimated at $5,000. The maintenance expense for the Greer Park expansion (Phase IV) is estimated at $9,000.

In contrast, however, the renovation of playing fields, replacing irrigated turf with synthetic turf, and thereby eliminating mowing, fertilizing, de-thatching and irrigation costs, would result in an annual savings to the City estimated at $30,000 per field. The renovation of fields with synthetic turf also will result in a significant increase in efficiency by increasing the number of playable days each year the fields would be accessible for field sports.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
This report does not represent any change to existing City policies. Improvement and enhancement of City parks and facilities is consistent with Policy C-22 of the Community Services element of the Comprehensive Plan: Design and construct new community facilities to have flexible functions to ensure adaptability to the changing needs of the community; and Policy C-24: Reinvest in aging facilities to improve their usefulness and appearance.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**
Approval of the recommended prioritization of potential park projects does not constitute a project that would require environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
**NEXT STEPS**

As part of the agreement with Stanford University for the development of the Stanford/Palo Alto Community Playing Fields complex, in February the City will pay $212,000 from development impact fees for the City’s share of construction cost. The City will also use $500,000 from Per Capita State Grant funds for this obligation.

On August 7, 2006, Council has also approved the commitment of $75,000 from impact fees for the public/private partnership with the Heritage Park LLC for the construction of playground equipment at Heritage Park (CMR:310:06). Council also approved the allocation of $400,000 from impact fees for the expansion of Greer Park (Phase IV) (CMR:311:06).

A proposal for $200,000 for the construction of the Seale Park restroom will be included in the 2007-2009 Capital Improvement Project budget for Council approval.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Prioritization of Potential Park Projects  
Attachment B: Excerpt of Minutes of the Park and Recreation Commission July 25, 2006, Regular Meeting

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